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## RITUAL ACTIVITIES

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Few, if any, Washo activities do not contain an element which we can describe as religious, supernatural, or magical. This element is most commonly revealed by specifically ritualized behavior carried on while a regular course of action is being taken by a Washo. The following sections will deal with this ritualized behavior and the rationale for it offered by the Washo.

### CONCEPTION AND CONTRACEPTION

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Apparently the Washo have no specific ritual to encourage conception. They are extremely fond of children and desire as many as possible. No Washo has ever heard of, or will admit having heard of, infanticide among the Washo, although they have heard of the practice among other Indians. The birth of an illegitimate child, despite the attitude of whites, is greeted with as much joy as that of a legitimate child.

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However, it is believed that conception can be prevented by manipulation of the afterbirth. When the afterbirth is expelled it is wrapped in a piece of deer hide or cloth and buried. It is always placed right side up if a woman desires to continue bearing children. If she wishes not to have children it is buried upside down. If at a later time she wishes to become pregnant, she will turn the earth where the upside-down afterbirth was buried. Informants say that not many people do this any more, mainly because younger women go to the hospital to have their babies, but that many people know how and some may still do it.

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Certain Indians are reported to be able to prevent the birth of children without the knowledge of the woman concerned. This requires the cooperation of a woman who has just had a child and who will give the magician the afterbirth. It is then buried or hidden upside down and the woman concerned will not become pregnant. The method of transferring the influence of the afterbirth from the real mother to the victim was not explained, and in fact the practice was revealed with a good deal of reluctance.

### BIRTH

(2178-2293)

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Informants report that the baby was not touched, either by the mother or her attendants, until the afterbirth was expelled. The birth and recuperation were carried out in a pit filled with warm ashes. A slow birth was blamed on the belief that the mother had slept too much or been lazy during her pregnancy.

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The mother was not allowed to eat salt until the baby's umbilicus dropped off, usually in two or three days. The umbilicus was dried and hung on the right side of the cradleboard to insure that the baby would be right-handed.

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The baby's hair was cut about thirty days after its birth. Until that time the mother was not permitted to eat meat or to leave her bed of ashes. However, one of my informants who had borne eight children claimed never to have spent more than two weeks in her lying-in bed. She did insist that "in the old days" women adhered to the traditional thirty-day period.

14. (8) In the other galis dangal lived Jack's youngest wife, her daughter, the mother of the three wives, and a related family consisting of a man (D'beh'eh, "gun shooter"), his wife, and three girls that walked down from Loyalton because "this galis dangal needed a man too."

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15. (8) Shortly after Little Josie, her husband (Damtanga), three girls, and her mother moved to Truckee, her mother died so the family tore the galis dangal down. "Little Josie had her man make the new galis dangal big and four men worked together on it. Then her husband froze to death while hunting. She stayed in that galis dangal for about another year. She was glad to leave it when she married Budish and they built a new galis dangal over the hill," Budish brought a son (shin) by a previous marriage into the house.

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Little Josie's oldest daughter (Minnie Truckee) was not married, but she had a half breed "railroad daughter." The middle daughter (Josie) had a Washo husband (Jim Winters) in Reno and a son and daughter living with her. The youngest daughter, her White husband, and their three or four children lived in a separate cabin some distance from the galis dangal.

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The mean number of occupants in these fifteen galis dangal is seven while the range is from three to thirteen. The number for any single galis dangal varied from season to season when the men and often the whole family moved to Lake Tahoe to fish, hunt, and gather plants. The Washo in the town of Truckee around 1900 worked at menial tasks for the Truckee Hotel or the saw-mills and peddled the fish and game they caught to the White residents. Washo baskets were just beginning to be sold as curios to the Whites and probably not more than a dozen were made for sale in any given year of that period.

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#### Some Historical Considerations

History begins in the Washo territory comparatively late. We have no definite information on the presence of Whites in Washo territory prior to 1826. The Spaniards had been in California, primarily along the coast, sometime previous to this, but their contact is questionable and their influence was extremely meager.

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The decade of the 1850's was for the Washo a period of the most rapid cultural and environmental change they have ever experienced. In those few years the White intruders displaced the Washo and changed their environment sufficiently to require them to depend upon the former for survival (Fairfield 1916; James 1921).

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In the early 1900's the Washo used the word "kavayo" for horse, which is related to the Spanish term, but this term seems to have been borrowed from

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